



## **Start of Helen Blank Collection**

**AR 11286**

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LEO BAECK INSTITUTE

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Helen Blake Collection, 2001

AHC

**THE AUSTRIAN HERITAGE COLLECTION AT THE LEO BAECK INSTITUTE  
AUSTRIAN-JEWISH IMMIGRANTS IN THE USA**

LEO BAECK INSTITUTE: 15 W 16TH STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10011, TEL (212) 744 6400

8/24/2001

**Contents of the Helen Rose Blank - Collection**

all items are copies except when otherwise indicated;

1.) AHC questionnaire I & II

2.) 'Growing up in Vienna' memoir, text given as talk by Helen Blank in the New School University in New York City; 8 pages; (original)

3.) Certificate stating that Helene Bilber [Helen Blank] teaches at "Wiener Talmud - Thora Schulverein" [Jewish elementary and high school in 1020 Vienna, Austria]; issued by director of "Israelitische Kultusgemeinde in Wien" [Jewish Community in Vienna, Austria] on 12/7/1938;

4.) Letter of recommendation for Helene Bilber [Helen Blank], issued by Dr. Joel Pollak of the "Wiener Talmud - Thora Schulverein" [Jewish elementary and high school in 1020 Vienna, Austria]; dated 1/1939;

Addenda

1) Copy of radio program with Interview with Fritz Spielmann, broadcasted by Austrian Broadcasting Corporation on 10/18/1987;

1928

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LEO BAECK INSTITUTE: 15 WEST 16<sup>TH</sup> STREET, 4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10011, TEL (212) 744 - 6400

Name: HELEN ROSE BLANK  
First Name Middle Name Last Name

Occupation in US: Retired

Date of Birth: Apr. 15 1917 Place of Birth: Vienna Austria  
Month Day Year City Country

Prewar Address: XV, Markgraf Rüdiger pl. 24 10 Vienna Austria  
Street (District, if in Vienna) City Country

Prewar Name: HELENE BILBER Maiden Name: BILBER

1. Education/Occupation(s) (please if possible, indicate institutions and year when entered/left)  
BUNDES ERZIEHUNGS ANSTALT WIEN VII u. Wien III 1932 - 1935 (Gymnasium)  
LEHRER Ausbildung Anstalt für Volksschullehrer 1936  
Volksschul Lehrerin - Taland Thoma Schule - Marz Gasse, II. Bezirk. 1938 (Sept - Jan 39)

2. Were you affiliated with any kind of organization (Youth, Zionist, Political) etc.)?  
If so, did you have any specific function?

Sozialistische Mittelschüler

3. Were you arrested and/or interned? (please indicate where and when)

No

4. What was your route of emigration? (please indicate places and dates of stay)

1939 - Vienna -> N.Y.

5. May we contact you again with a more detailed follow-up questionnaire?

(please circle)

Yes / No

6. Do you have any documents, such as photographs, letters, diaries, all kinds of manuscripts, etc., that would be appropriate for the archives of the LBI?

Yes / No

*If necessary please use additional sheets. Thank you!*

1928

THE AUSTRIAN HERITAGE COLLECTION AT THE LEO BAECK INSTITUTE  
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LEO BAECK INSTITUTE: 129 E 73 STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10021, TEL (212) 744 6400

We kindly ask you to answer the following questions in as much detail as possible, either in English or in German. If you need more space, please feel free to use additional sheets. If you don't know the answers to certain questions or don't want to answer for any reason, just go on to the next question.

NAME: HELEN BLANK DATE: 3/16/01

1. BEFORE MARCH 1938

- 1.1 Please describe your parental home.  
(Did you live in an apartment or in a house? How many people lived with you? Did you have servants? What language(s) were spoken in the household?)

APARTMENT -

GERMAN

see attached Report for details

- 1.2 Please tell us about your neighborhood (District in Vienna or area).  
(What ethnic groups lived there? Religious life? Relationships between Jews and non-Jews? Relationships with neighbors?)

16. Bezirk (Fünfhaus) - mostly Catholics - very few Jews.  
Relationship good.

mother from a very orthodox home. Kept it til I was 6 yrs old. Then my grandmother followed her family to U.S.A (1924?) and my mother stopped all orthodox rites in our home,

- 1.3 What religious tradition existed in your family?  
(Did you keep kosher, go to synagogue, observe holidays, etc.?)

see 1.2  
after 1924 only Kinder Gottesdienst obligatory by school.

- 1.4 Please, tell us about your friends and acquaintances.  
(Were they mostly Jewish or non-Jewish? Did you have any close non-Jewish friends?)

Mostly Non-Jewish friends - many of them friends, some  
very close

- 1.5 Were you affiliated with any political, social or religious organization?  
(Youth Organizations, Zionist Organizations, Political Parties, other organizations)  
If so, did you have any specific function?

see attached Report

- 1.6 Did you or your family encounter any anti-Semitism before March 1938?  
(If so, please give details.)

No

- 1.7 What was your (or your parents') reaction to Hitler's rise to power in Germany in 1933 and to Nazi activity in Austria in the early thirties? Did you or your parents feel threatened by these events?

See Report

2. FROM MARCH 1938 TO EMIGRATION - FROM EUROPE TO AMERICA

2.1 How was your time spent during and after the "Anschluss"?

What was the Impact of the "Anschluss" on you personally?

(Were you expelled from school/university? Did you or your parents lose your jobs?

Were your apartments/houses looted? Were you (or members of your family)

persecuted? Were you forced to scrub the streets?)

Mother lost her job.

Since all Jewish children had to go to one school in the 2<sup>nd</sup> District, I got a job as Volksschullehrerin at Talmud-Thora Schule - Malzgasse.

See details in Report

I was once caught to clean up inside a department store in the 1.<sup>st</sup> District. It lasted one morning.

2.2 How did non-Jewish friends, colleagues, schoolmates, neighbors, etc. behave toward you and your family?

they were helpful - at their own risk -  
good friends remained friends.

2.3 Do you have any recollections of November 9th, 1938, the so-called "Reichs-Kristallnacht"? (If so, please give details.)

Yes - the next morning at the school, where I worked.

We had no radio, nor a telephone, - The neighborhood was quite, so I went to work as usual in the morning.

(See details in report).

My mother must have heard about it after I left and she and my sister came to the Malzgasse looking for me, but couldn't find me, because we were in the school, surrounded by SS & SA. After they let us go, my mother was waiting where I

2.4 Were you or any members of your family arrested? Sent to a camp? *Came streaming out.*  
(If so, please give details.)

NO

2.5 Can you recall the process of obtaining papers necessary for emigration? (Did you try to obtain visas for other countries as well? Were you supported by any relief organization, by relatives or friends?) *no other countries.*

Lined for hours & hours many times.

I was able to get the passports for my mother & sister, but not mine.

After many visits there I ran into a friend I had not seen for a long time. It was going up the spiral staircase and he came down in P.S. uniform.

"What are you doing here?" After I explained to him he said "Next time they say 'your passport is not here' say 'Please look one more time'."

And that is how I got my passport finally. I don't remember his name.

2.6 What happened to your (or your family's) apartments, houses, businesses and other property?

My mother had to stay 3 more months in Vienna after my sister + I left (Polish quota). She was able to sell the furniture & the people who got our apartment let her stay until she was able to leave. (And they were Nazis).

2.7 When did you leave Austria? (Please indicate exact date, if possible)

Jan. 12<sup>th</sup> 1939

2.8 If you did not emigrate directly to the U.S, where did you go first?  
(How long did you stay there? Can you give a brief description of your experiences? Why did you leave?)

3. THE UNITED STATES

3.1 When did you arrive in the U.S.? (Please indicate exact date, if possible)

Feb 4, 1939

3.2 Did members of your family emigrate to countries other than the U.S.? (If so, where? Where do they live today? Are you still in contact with them?)

My father was in Tel Aviv. I don't know how he got there. Never heard anything about his family in Tarnopol. He had a sister Rosa, who had 3 boys.

My mother's family went to U.S.A. (father & sister before U.W.I - mother in 1924)

3.3 Did you serve in the U.S. Armed Forces or in any other allied army? (If so, when did you join? What division? What was your area of operation? When were you discharged?)

**3.4 Please list places and dates of residence in the U.S.**  
(City, State; in bigger cities, neighborhood)

Brooklyn, N.Y. 1939-1974  
Manhattan 1974 until now.

**3.5 Please describe your occupational situation from your arrival in the U.S. to the present.**

- 1.) manual jobs for the first few years (Household, factory, night club gardener)
- 2.) entered Univ. - clerical jobs.
- 3.) 1948-1982 at a wholesale house where I was quickly promoted. The company helped me with my education. Undergraduate - Accounting  
Graduate School - Computer  
was in charge of all Computer work of the company.

1982-1992 - Perfume accounting systems on computer.  
**3.6 Did you belong to any emigrant/immigrant-related organization or cultural association? (e.g. Austrian American Federation, Austrian Forum, etc.? If so, since when? Do you still belong to any of them?)**

Free Austrian Youth

Austrian Forum

Austrian American Federation

( gibt es in New York leider nicht mehr )

3.7 Do you still speak German? If so, with whom and when? How often?

German Literature Class at J.R.P.-New School for about 10 Years.  
Lending German Books from Donall Library (13<sup>th</sup> fl.)

Speaking German with 2 Friends  
also with my sister

How often? Night off from work!

3.8 Would you call yourself religious? To what degree? What is your affiliation? Has it changed?

(Do you keep kosher, go to synagogue, observe the holidays,...?)

Not religious.

But respect the Jewish traditions.

(Never worked on the High Holidays)

3.9 Are your friends and acquaintances mostly German-speaking or non-German-speaking? Mainly Jewish or not?

Not many German speaking friends left.

Friends both Jewish + non-Jewish

3.10 Of what country (countries) are you a citizen? When was each citizenship granted?

U.S.A. 1942 (husband was born in Vienna, but U.S.A. citizen)

AUSTRIA 1917-1938 re-granted in 1997

**3.11 Have you ever visited Austria since the war? If so, how often?**

(What did you do there? Can you recall some of your impressions during these visits?  
Have you ever thought of going back permanently?)

3 Times

Spent most of my visits to Austria with old friends.  
(Was Jewish)

I still love the city, but am very upset & disappointed  
about the success of the Freedom Party.

If I were younger I might try to live there - not any more -

**4. PARTICIPATION IN OTHER ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS**

**4.1 Have you ever been interviewed by any other organization?**

(Please indicate when and by which organization?)

No

**4.2 Have you ever been mentioned in any historical works?**

(Holocaust-related literature, Documentary films, Exhibitions etc.)

No

## 5. FAMILY MEMBERS

5.1 Spouse (Name, Maiden Name, Place/date of birth (if deceased, place/date of death), Occupation(s))

1.) PHIL ROSNER - VIENNA, 1915 - divorced

2.) BILL BLANK - U.S.A. - 1919 - divorced

5.2 Mother (Name, Maiden Name, Place/date of birth (if deceased, place/date of death), Occupation(s))

ETA BILBER - MAYANOW - 1890 - NEE KATZ  
died 1991 in N.Y.

5.3 Father (Name, Place/date of birth (if deceased, place/date of death), Occupation(s))

MARKUS BILBER - TARNOPOL - 1886

died 1941 in Tel Aviv

5.4 Siblings (Name, Maiden Name, Place/date of birth (if deceased, place/date of death), Occupation(s))

A NICE TURKOW, nee BILBER - Vienna, 1920.

- 5.5 Children (Name, Maiden Name, Address (City, State, Country), Place/date of birth (if deceased, place/date of death), Occupation(s))

MARGUERITE MALONE NEE ROSNER  
SANTA CRUZ, CAL. U.S.A.  
BORN 1940 in N.Y.

- 5.6 Grandparents (Name, Maiden Name, Place/date of birth (if deceased, place/date of death), Occupation(s))

? KATZ } died in N.Y.  
CHAIM KATZ }

*The Austrian Heritage Collection is always looking for people to interview.*

*If you know any Austrian-Jewish immigrants in the US who might be interested in participating in this project, please either ask them to contact us or write their addresses below.*

ALICE JURON - (SISTER) 34 HAMILTON RD.  
ARLINGTON, MASS 02474

ALMA KUGEL : 62 FALMOUTH AVE.  
WHITING VILLAGE N.J. 08759

*Thank you very much for participating in this project.*

AMTS DIREKTION  
DER  
ISRAELITISCHEN KULTUSGEMEINDE  
WIEN  
I. SEITENSTETTENGASSE 4

Wien, 7. Dezember 1938.

Die Leitung der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde Wien  
bestätigt, dass Frau Helene Eilber, Wien, XV, Mitzgräf Rüdiger-  
strasse 36/10 wohnhaft, an der unter Aufsicht der Kultusgemeinde ste-  
hender Vereins-Volksschule (-----) erwacht.

Der Amtsdirektor:  
*[Signature]*  
Leiter  
der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde  
Wien.

W I E N E R   T A L M U D - T H O R A   S C H U L V E R E I N

gegründet 1850  
Wien II., Malzgasse 16.

Von der h.o.Schulleitung wird bestätigt, dass  
Fräulein Helene B i l b e r, geboren am 15.4.1917 in Wien, wohnhaft in Wien  
XV., Markgraf Rüdigerstrasse 26/10, seit dem Herbst 1938 an unserer Volks-  
schule als Lehrerin beschäftigt ist.

Schon in der kurzen Zeit unserer gemeinsamen  
Arbeit hat sich gezeigt, welch tüchtige Lehrerin Fräulein Bilber ist. Es  
gelang ihr in erstaunlich kurzer Zeit sich in den religiösen Geist unse-  
rer Schule einzufühlen. Es zeigte sich bald welch angeborenes Geschick sie in  
Unterricht besitzt. Ihre gute Vorbereitung, ihr Pflichteifer haben ihr die  
Möglichkeit gegeben, die ihr anvertrauten Kinder in musterhafter Disziplin  
zu einer wahren Klassengemeinschaft zu gestalten. Wir bedauern sehr, dass  
sie nicht schon früher an unserer Schule kam und wir können ihr nur wün-  
schen, dass sie bald in ihrer neuen Heimat Gelegenheit findet, Kinder un-  
terrichten und erziehen zu dürfen. Ihre Arbeit wird jede Institution zu  
Nutzen bringen.

G-ttes Segen möge ihren künftigen Lebensweg  
begleiten!



*Joel Pollak*  
gez. Dr. Joel Pollak

Wien, im Jänner 1939.



**End of Helen Blank Collection**

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